

تصوير السكان المحليين في رواية "معبّر الى الهند"

طالبة الدراسات العليا: هيام كاسوچه

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ملخص

يهدف هذا البحث الى دراسة كيفية تصوير المستعمر البريطاني للسكان الهنود المحليين في رواية (معبّر إلى الهند) تستكشف الرواية أبعاد العلاقة الاجتماعية بين المستعمر والبلاد المستعمرة. يوضح هذا البحث أيضا أن هذه الرواية نقد للإمبريالية التي تنشأ من إنجلترا إلى بيئات أجنبية وتنقل جوانبها السلبية مثل العنصرية والقسوة والاستغلال.

كلمات مفتاحية: السكان المحليين, معبر الى

الهند, المستعمر - المستعمر والعنصرية.



The Representation of the Natives in A Passage to India

Abstract

This research aims to study how the British colonizer represents Indian natives in *A Passage to India*. The novel explores the dimensions of the colonizer-colonized relationship socially. This research also declares that this novel can be interpreted as a critique of Imperialism which emerges from England into foreign environments, and conveys its negative aspects, such as racism, cruelty and exploitation.

Key Words: natives, *A Passage to India*, colonizer-colonized, and racism.

This research explores the theme of the representation of Indians in Forster's *A Passage to India*. It is a representation of the social interactions in India at the time of the British Empire, which in turn is a reflection of the binary opposition between East and West. Major characters such as Aziz and Fielding are of great importance since, together, they reflect a unique relationship between Anglo-Indians and the natives. The opening chapter of the novel prepares the reader towards the portrayal of India and Indians as inferior to others, as Elleke Boehmer asserts: "Because the racial divide was so essential to sustaining notions of white superiority, even a slight modification of the rules of association- whether within the white community or in dealings with the local population- would threaten the

structures which upheld the entire system" (p. 65).

The choice of words to describe the imaginary Indian town, Chandrapore, and its climate, its landscape and its people, is humiliating. Forster draws the fictional town with a kind of horror and disgust:

Except for the Marabar Caves—and they are twenty miles off—the city of Chandrapore presents nothing extraordinary. Edged rather than washed by the river Ganges, it trails for a couple of miles along the bank, scarcely distinguishable from the rubbish it deposits so freely. [...] So abased, so monotonous is everything that meets the eye, that when the Ganges comes down, it might be expected to wash the excrescence back into the soil. Houses

do fall, people are drowned and left rotting, but the general outline of the town persists, swelling here, shrinking there, like some low but indestructible form of life. (*A Passage to India*, p. 31)

The source of the stereotypes is a collection of prejudicial assumptions about the Orientals that Said calls 'Orientalism'. Said says, "The Orient in itself was subordinated intellectually to the West. As material for study or reflection the Orient acquired all the marks of an inherent weakness" (*Orientalism*, p. 152). In this way, Orientalist principles characterize the Eastern world based on stereotypes as an inferior world, a world of irrationality, savagery, backwardness and uncivilized, but identify themselves as a superior world, a

world that is rational, progressive and civilized. The District Superintendent of Police, Mr. McBryde, British police officer, has an Orientalist doctrine about the Indians. "All natives who live south of latitude 30 are criminals at heart" (*A Passage to India*, p. 176). The psychology of the people, McBryde tells Fielding, is different in India. The collector declares India to be a "poisonous country" and its people as "jackals".

Chapter two ends with the declaration that Indians are not allowed into Chandrapore club, even the educated ones, in spite of their mimicry and complete assimilation of imperial culture. Forster shows that educated Indians like Dr. Aziz would avoid politics at all costs. Haq, Aziz and others admit their inadequacy and

inferiority at all levels. This is meant to justify the presence of the British in India forever and forever.

The main character of the novel is Dr. Aziz, a Muslim doctor in Chandrapore and a widower. At the beginning of the novel, Aziz is scornful of the English, wishing only to consider them comically or ignore them completely. Although he is educated and intelligent, he is not allowed into the Chandrapore club because he is an Indian. As Thody declares in *Twentieth-Century Literature*:

Forster is critical of English racialism. Because his skin is the wrong colour, Dr. Aziz is excluded from the club to which his intelligence and skill give him every right to belong, and the moment an accusation is made about him,

the European immediately believe it on the slenderest of evidence. (p. 243)

After Aziz's arrival to the Civil Surgeon's home and being ignored, he visits a local Islamic temple where he meets Mrs. Moore. Aziz reprimands her for not taking her shoes off in the temple before realizing that she has in fact observed this rule "madam, this is a mosque, you have no right here at all; you should have taken off your shoes; this is a holy place for Moslems" (*A Passage to India*, p. 42). The two soon find that they have much in common and they immediately become friends. When he says to her that few ladies do not take off their shoes especially if thinking no one is there, she replies: "That makes no difference. God is here" (*A Passage to India*, p. 42). It is almost as they have met in another life or realm. While

their commonalities may bring them together, their race and background only tear them apart. Dr. Aziz explains to Mrs. Moore that the British should not be seen with the Indians. Abdul R. Jan Mohamed declares in his article in "Critical Inquiry": "European colonisers exercise direct and continuous bureaucratic control and military coercion of the natives: during this phase the consent of the natives is primarily passive and indirect" (p.61).

Aziz attempts to be decent to the English, but the response he gets is his arrest following the visit to the Marabar Caves. Mr. Turton, the collector, as he testifies against Aziz in the Court, says:

I have had twenty-five years' experience of this country, and during those twenty-five years I have never known anything but disaster result when English people and Indians attempt to be intimate socially. Intercourse, yes. Courtesy, by all means. Intimacy never, never. The whole weight of my authority is against it. (*A Passage to India*, p. 173)

Major Callendar, in spite of the fact that he knows Dr. Aziz to be a better professional, describes him as a man with, "no grit, no guts". He even reprimands him for not doing his duty and wandering around. Moreover, he shows his temper to Aziz. The Indians are portrayed as cringing towards the British and living with constant fear.

Mrs. Turton, a British woman, describes the Indian women as if they were commodities. An Indian woman is described only as a "shorter lady" and the other one is called the "taller lady". She hardly treats them like living individuals, with their respective personalities and identities, "All the Indian ladies, were uncertain, cowering, recovering, giggling, making tiny gestures of atonement or despair" (*A Passage to India*, p.62). It is only a stereotype portrayal, meant to reinforce the imperial ideology of superiority and to contain India and Indians. When the innocent Aziz is freed and the mob is rioting, just after Major Calendar boasts of his medical cruelties to the "buck nigger" Nureddin, says "there's not such a thing as cruelty after a thing like this". Mrs. Turton virulently responds "exactly, and remember it afterwards, you men. You are weak, weak,

weak. Why, they ought to crawl from here to the caves on their hands and knees whenever an Englishwoman's in sight, they oughtn't to be spoken to, they ought to be spat at, they ought to be ground into the dust" (*A Passage to India*, p. 220).

Through a character analysis of the attitudes and mentality of the colonial administrators of the British Empire in India, the novel conveys its anti-imperial critique. For example, Ronny Heaslop is a representative of an official who embodies the imperial ideal of the 'White Man's Burden' in his job as Chandrapore's City Magistrate. In his capacity of an administrator of law, he believes that it is his duty to work in India to impose order onto its chaos. In *Critical Terrains* in the

chapter of Orientalism as Literary Criticism,
Lisa Lowe says:

Missionaries, colonial administrators, members and officials of the Indian Civil Service, and their wives, wrote about India as if its people were caught in a primordial past imagined as anterior to their own society before its evolution to civilization. they represent the British presence there as a high and holy mission to save souls and to deliver the Indians from pagan sexuality. (p. 108)

Thus, the white man's burden is a form of conquest because those who adhere to it falsely believe that they have a duty to impose superior Western concepts of humanity, civilization, morality, ethics and justice onto other nations. "England holds India for

her own good" (*A Passage to India* p. 124). It is the typical rhetoric of the white man's burden which justifies the British presence in India. However, Forster shows this by giving voice to an Indian scepticism of Britain's right to rule India. Jan Mohamed also says in his article in "Critical Inquiry", "Colonialist discursive, particularly its literature, are not very useful in controlling the conquered group at its early stage: the native is not subjected, nor does his culture disintegrate, simply because a European characterizes both as savage" (p. 62). Hamidullah, questioning the alleged moral superiority of the Empire, asks Fielding "Excuse the question, but if this is the case, how is England justified in holding India?" (p. 124).

The novel shows that India is too complex to be dealt with . It is skeptical because Ronny is trying to control a world that is not his own. This is suggested in his perception of the Indians as ‘incoherent’. Furthermore, the novel is ironic about Ronny setting himself up as an authority of truth and justice. Ronny’s thoughts suggest a colonial narrative in which the Indians are portrayed as being inferior and in need of the British to rule them. In the passage quoted above no perspective is given of the Indians themselves. They are seen as being incoherent criminals, liars, and flatterers. Although at this point Ronny is referring to Indian criminals, this view of Indians resonates in his and other colonialists’ minds about Indians in general.

A Passage to India begins and ends by posing the question whether it is possible for an English and an Indian to be friends, at least within the context of British colonialism. Forster uses this question as a framework to explore the general issues of Britain's political control of India on a more personal level, through the friendship between Aziz and Fielding. As the story ends, they part on a strained note:

'Why can't we be friends now?' said the other, holding him affectionately. 'It's what I want. It's what you want.' But the horses didn't want it - they swerved apart; the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which riders pass singly-file. the temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into

view as they issued from the gap and saw beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, "No, not yet," and the sky said, "No, not there". (*A Passage to India* p. 316)

Indeed, Forster acknowledges the need for India to be free before such a friendship can take place, though he is aware of the problematic issues involved in the effort to set India free. Jan Mohamed also comments in his article "The Economy of Manichean Allegory" on the discussion between Aziz and Fielding at the end of the novel, saying: "On initial consideration, the discussion between Aziz and fielding at the end of the novel strongly implies that colonialism, which necessarily involves the subordination of one to the other, is the real barrier" (p. 77).

The colonizers arrive fresh from England "intending to be gentlemen, and are told it will not do. Hence, they all become exactly the same not worse, not better" (*A Passage to India*, p. 9).

Ronny Heaslop complains that "people are so odd out here, and it's not like home one's always facing the footlights [...] They notice everything, until they're perfectly sure you're their sort" (*A Passage to India*, p. 44). Individuality is problematic in a colony because the people there should adopt the same ideologies. Ronny realizes the illegitimacy of the British presence in India. Yet, to retain his privileges and to remain an accepted, as well as respected part of the colony, he tries hard to convince himself and others of the legitimacy of the

British presence in India. He interrogates his mother as follows:

Did you gather he [Aziz] was well-disposed? Ignorant of the force of this question, she replied, "Yes, quite, after the first moment." "I meant, generally. Did he seem to tolerate us the brutal conqueror, the sun-dried bureaucrat, that sort of thing?" (*A Passage to India* p. 53)

These words reveal Ronny's awareness of the British status as a "brutal conqueror" and his strong desire to protect it from potential threats. Mrs. Moore is shocked at the transformation of her son. She is also shocked to hear that her son has adopted ideological stance. She protests, "You never used to judge people like this at home" (*A Passage to India*, p. 54). Ronny announces

that "India isn't home" and relies on "phrases and arguments that he had picked up from older officials, and he did not feel quite sure of himself" (*A Passage to India*, p. 54) to silence his mother and convince her of his adopted new logic.

At the house of Hamidullah, the Indians are shown as slaves, recalling the words expressed by the white people towards them. The narrator confirms the subject and the reductive status of the Indians. Forster shows the fate of Indian women worse than men do. The wife of Hamidullah is in purdah, she cannot take her dinner before men take it. She believes that women have no possible life and existence without marriage and men. The narrator describes the fate of the Indian women as mere wedlock and motherhood.

Nayantara Sahagal in her article "passion to India" sustains the same idea saying, "Our society conditions young girls to believe that Real Life consists of getting married, having children, promoting one's husband's career [...] as women are supposed to be round-the-clock wives, mothers, housekeepers" (p. 81).

The Indians are portrayed as lazy, with parasitic tendencies. Latif, an Indian character, has never done a stroke of work; he lives off the generosity of Hamidullah. His wife lives somewhere else in similar circumstances. Latif hardly visits her. He is shown worrying about political and philosophical issues. This is a negative comment on the Indian character. The Indians are also portrayed as ashamed of themselves

and of their culture. This reflects the impact of imperial culture upon the native culture and identity. Dr. Aziz is also portrayed as ashamed of his house, which he regards as a shanty. It is infested with black flies. Dr. Aziz is constructed as a man, who has assimilated the Western culture to the extent, that he has developed an Orientalist vision, leading to self-pity and self-hatred. To escape from the possible embarrassment, he invites Miss Quested and Mrs. Moor at the Marabar caves. Dr. Aziz is presented as an immature person who invites his guests to the Marabar caves, without having ever seen or visited himself that place beforehand. Ronny calls Dr. Aziz as the spoilt westernized type, in other words, a mimic man.

Everything associated with India is bad and ugly; Even April is a month of horrors. Indian sun, instead of having any beauty and glory, is sinister. In India, however, "the retreat is from the source of life, the treacherous sun, and no poetry adorns it, because disillusionment cannot be beautiful" (*A Passage to India*, p. 199). Ronny notes that "there's nothing in India but the weather [...] it's the alpha and omega of the whole affair" (*A Passage to India*, p. 45). India's hostility to its colonizers is demonstrated in the heat, which becomes so problematic to the English. "The sun is crashing on their backs," and they are "pursued by stabs of hot air". Hot weather is also depicted as a "monster" (*A Passage to India*, p. 186). The Indian landscape is described as poor, trees are said to have a

poor quality. In *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*, Boehmer declares that:

There was the strategy of displacement, a device whereby the intransigence or discomfort the colonizer experienced was projected on to the native. This is clearly demonstrated in the process of othering. Especially where they were resistant to his requirements, the European represented colonized people as unruly, inscrutable, or malign. In *A Passage to India*, Adela Quested, 'drawn into a mass of Indians', finds it 'as if the heat of the sun had boiled and fried all the glories of the earth into a single mess'. (p. 90)

The hostility of India is further highlighted when compared with the depiction of other places in the novel. Such as Venice, it is

different from 'hostile' India. "The buildings of Venice, like the mountains of Crete and the fields of Egypt, stood in the right place, whereas in poor India everything was placed wrong. Fielding had forgotten the beauty of form among idol temples and lumpy hills; indeed, without form, how can there be beauty?" (*A Passage to India* p. 265). India has nothing pleasing to offer to its colonizers. Moreover, India refuses a friendship between a native and a colonizer. The arrival of Ronny during Fielding's tea party ruins the friendly mood. "It was as if irritation exuded from the very soil" (*A Passage to India*, p. 71). The sky also turns "angry orange" to express its objection to the presence of the colonizers.

All the incidents through the novel indicate that friendship between a dominant and a subservient people is rarely possible. The final answer to the question of friendship is emphatically negative: English and Indians cannot be friends until Indians are politically independent. Aziz's vow to Fielding, "India shall be a nation! ... We may hate one another but we hate you most... we shall drive every blasted English man into the sea, and then... you and I shall be friends" (*A Passage to India*, p. 322). *A passage to India* embodies the truth that Orientals hate their European oppressors. Colonizers always introduced a false image of the natives and they did their best to present the Indian natives as primitive, uneducated and inferior people. All that is to justify their presence in India pretending

to bring civilisation to this uncivilised country.

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